Strengthening HRC Membership

Background

A/RES/60/251 provides in OP 8 that when electing members of the Council, "Member States shall take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto." In addition, OP 9 provides that "members elected to the Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, fully cooperate with the Council, and be reviewed under the UPR mechanism during their term of membership." OP 8 also provides that a two thirds majority in the General Assembly may suspend the rights of membership of a member that commits "gross and systematic violations of human rights."

Issues to Address

While A/RES/60/251 sets high standards for membership, there is nothing in the IBP that elaborates on the criteria above or provides guidance on how states should apply them concretely. Membership of the Council should be inclusive, including allowing for full participation by smaller states.

Concrete Proposals

1. Candidates for council membership should defend their human rights record in an interactive dialogue in New York at the General Assembly before the election.
2. During the New York interactive dialogue, the candidate countries should publicly present their pledges for membership, using a standard format that is specific and measurable. If a country is running for re-election, they should be evaluated on how they fulfilled their pledges.
3. The HRC should establish benchmarks for membership to be used when considering candidates. Benchmarks could include implementation of human rights treaties it has ratified, whether the country is under any sanctions related to human rights, the nature of human rights complaints against a country, how the country is following up on its accepted UPR recommendations, how the country has cooperated with special procedures, or how the candidate country has contributed to human rights initiatives. Specific information on how the country meets the established benchmarks should be compiled and available before elections.
4. Regional groups should be required to nominate more candidates than available seats, rather than present a clean slate, as competition allows for a better evaluation of candidates.